

Dear:

7/14/08

Ravalli County Environmental Health Director

Ravalli County Interim Planning Director

Ravalli County Commissioners Thompson

Editor

What more should we expect from the county government? Apparently three applicants for Planning Director constituted none and an interim director appointed. The Planning Department has three priorities: land use, subdivision review, and protection of health and safety of county residents with respect to land use. Land use complaints are not isolated or infrequent in Ravalli County. If our county government cannot or refuses to protect its people, then what good is that government? What does a planner candidate know about how to protect health and safety of county residents if they think their sole job is to review subdivision projects? Ravalli County needs a planning director who will collaborate with other departments, and protect county residents as per their department mission statement.

A planning director needs to advocate for the county residents who pay for the government, then focus on subdivision review, then try to present zoning in a way that would not adversely affect any stake-holding group. Once that was achieved (prior to Draft Z) our county can move forward on land use issues instead of being budget constrained by subdivision review taking the local focus out of the Ravalli County Planning Department.

Nothing amazes me about our county government anymore. They have a huge accountability problem and don't even know it. Within this letter, I will demonstrate how Ravalli County refuses to protect its taxpayers, and keeps an outward appearance that they can pull off zoning without an enforcement history in land use! Not until it has basic safety and health protections on land use covered first. What officer of this county government will enforce land use or zoning provisions if there are none currently?

A contingency or back up plan needs to be in place regarding land use in Ravalli County before zoning can be put in place. There is a clear right and wrong when a

resident is endangered. Unfortunately, the current Sheriff and County Attorney see things politically instead of practically. When a state fire official informs the county that 1000 wood pallets stacked within a foot of a residence and within inches of the roof joists are violating state fire code, neither official enforces/cites/prosecutes with respect to the land use issue. It gets better, 10 neighbors signed a community nuisance (a county ordinance which is not enforced) petition. The Sheriff's office went out of their way to say they would not take action. Even with an active sheriff department case against the neighbor, still no action by the county. Theresa, the third last Environmental Health Director in three years quit her job do to no interdepartmental assistance in Ravalli County with respect to Land Use (which included the current Sheriff Department).

Is it not clear that the safety of Ravalli County residents with respect to land use is more important than implementing a non-county wide zoning (without enforcement)? We first learned our ABC's, then spoke the language. The county is trying to get a masters degree in language (zoning) without knowing the basics. There needs to be communication among department heads from law enforcement, planning, environmental health, and the commissioners to coordinate response. Part of the planning department's mission statement and priority is to protect county residents regarding land use issues. A planner is ill-equipped to protect residents from land use disputes or protect county residents in general. It is time the Planning Department works for county residents instead of development companies who may not even live in the valley.

While I respect the Community Planning Commissions (CPC) groups who have worked hard on bring zoning to life, the reality is that the county is not even providing basic safeguards, NOT due to county "budget" problems, but rather due to the county wide politics problem. Zoning is pie in the sky, and premature if land use enforcement is not in place. This reality has not hit home to our commissioners, until residents of this county call upon the dissolution of the county government: due to taking undemocratic and costly actions with respect to zoning, hiring practices, interference and manipulation with media outlets, use of county employees outside their department mission statement, and general protection of county residents.

Tell the "tractor commander" at the Houston Space Center south of Victor on US 93 that the county no longer will tolerate land use disputes. Perhaps then his neighbor would not have been permanently and seriously disabled. The drainage ditch used as a surface wastewater-slurry and a flammable liquid conduit should never be acceptable as appropriate land use in Ravalli County. The landowner in this case has pleaded to our county government for over 5 years to for help. How would the planning director solve this problem?

The solution in years past has been to criminally charge the complaining party in an effort to silence the situation. Karen Hughes (former Planning Director) went ahead and published home addresses on the County Planning Department's website of complaint holders. As soon as we elect a competent Sheriff these enforcement problems should cease. It also helps to have a County Attorney who can work alongside a planning director, and will listen to county department heads who request prosecution of land use issues. When a publisher of a newspaper does not discipline or remove reporters who do not check the validity of their stories, the county commissioners are free to exploit their own agenda (like appointing an Interim Planning Director) without anyone catching their game. Ironically, the reason this publisher has her job is due to her predecessor being in the county's pocket.

The County needs to hire the best candidate for planning director that can be an administrator, put a high priority on the protection of county residents, fairly and appropriately evaluate subdivision proposals, and develop land use plans for the county so it is ready to accept future zoning implementation. The rocket scientists will not be applying for Planning Director and can't help Ravalli County with land use issues. It is up to the new director to uphold the department's mission statement which includes protecting county residents, something the former director failed miserably at.

Michael Spreadbury

PO Box 416

Hamilton MT 59840